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IN TRIBUTE TO ZSUZSA

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Zsuzsa Ferge's work continues to provide a significant contribution to social sciences, not just social policy, throughout the world. And she herself was a wonderful person who has left those of us who knew her with so many great memories.

My wife Dorothy and I met Zsuzsa Ferge in autumn 1970 at the University of Essex. Peter Townsend, the founding Professor of Sociology there, had been so impressed by discussions with her at international sociology and poverty meetings that he invited her to take his place while he was away on his first sabbatical year. Her teaching included the sociology of inequality, a significant innovation then – and still today. I was asked to help Zsuzsa settle into the department. This led to a marvellous friendship between Zsuzsa and our whole family. Working with her greatly broadened and enriched my understanding and thinking about society and what Zsuzsa called 'societal policy'.²

Contact revived in the 1980s after our move to Edinburgh with visits in both directions, often staying in each others' homes. I taught several terms in Zsuzsa's department. During a term here Zsuzsa stayed with us and our children. Her great friendship still warms us, and our daughter and grand-daughters with many wonderful memories. We benefited from her wise advice on so many issues. Her enthusiasm for travelling was infectious: in one joint trip to the Isle of Skye in the Inner Hebrides she delighted in phoning home from a public call box at a crossroads with not a house in sight.

Her visits to the UK greatly expanded the excellent reputation her writings had already built up here. She made contributions to our Social Policy Association conferences. She was awarded an honorary degree by the University of Edinburgh.

Zsuzsa's impact on my own thinking has many dimensions but it can be summarised in a single comment she made on a sunny summer afternoon in 1971. Talking about social policy in her Essex office, she said 'But it's all about inequality'. It took me years to really get to grips with this fundamental point, but I can now see its major influence across my career. It provided the basis for teaching that analysis of social policy has to be set in a broad structural context and cannot be confined to the social services. It helped me to make more of the work of Richard Titmuss, especially his 'social division of welfare', and Peter Townsend's concern to analyse and build 'a society for people' (Titmuss 1958, Alcock et al. 2001, Townsend 2009 [1958]).

Zsuzsa made me much more aware of the blinkering effect of 'the politics of poverty' on our vision for social policy and its reinforcing of the language of inequality. We were failing to understand how neo-liberal social policy was reviving many of the "poor law" traditions with dire consequences. This residualisation of

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² For the concept in Hungarian, see: Sinfield, A. (2016).

social policy, only studying the bottom of society to ease hardships and deprivation, reinforces inequalities and encourages the shaming of those trapped by poverty.

Zsuzsa's 1997 essay, 'The individualisation of the social', is probably her most quoted work in the UK. It shows very clearly how the individualistic shift closes off many options, making the tackling of both inequality and poverty more difficult. It dismantles collective social provision leaving people to buy services in the market – if they can. It rejects social explanations of need, individualising the causes of poverty and unemployment to 'blame the victim', weakening concern for the poor and strengthening the power of the very much better-off.

'In social science there is no neutral act' wrote Zsuzsa in her great book, *A Society in the Making: Hungarian Social and Societal Policy 1945–75* (1979, p 15). I have used this in introducing my own talks and lectures for years now – a point absolutely central to working in the social sciences. Values are at the core of what we are doing in social policy. Zsuzsa showed that social policy is not something we do to other people – 'them out there', 'them the takers' as opposed to us the taxpayers, the givers. This is the dominant and misleading view of many governments and people with power and influence. The study and practice of social and societal policy is about all of us and about creating the sort of society we want to live in. In using our expertise we have often slipped away from this, losing ourselves in technical issues.

I am not at all sure what impact I had on Zsuzsa's work in exchanging many early drafts as well as publications. I helped keep her up to date with UK work and provided details on particular policies or campaigns while she fed me with studies from other countries as well as her own. I think we both enjoyed the exchanges – I certainly did.

We both shared such a strong concern to tackle and reduce poverty and inequality in our countries and more broadly that we focused on what we agreed on. Disagreements were minor. Zsuzsa was more realistic about progress and more insightful in advance about the likely impact of restraints on public spending and the opening up of social rights and entitlements to minorities. She recognised that 'social policy has always been shaped by social struggles ...all these struggles may be seen as aiming to broaden the scope of social policy into societal policy improving the quality of society' (Ferge, 2008, pp 618-9).

Many times I thought her questions had gone off at a tangent only to realise that she had homed in on a key issue I had neglected. She always remained able to surprise and stimulate. The last time we joined in a seminar in Budapest Zsuzsa was asked to comment on my paper on the ways taxes can increase, not reduce, inequalities. I sent her my paper a few days beforehand. By the seminar she had put together a parallel analysis of Hungarian taxes that stimulated many more questions including the impact of the powerful on debating taxation systems.

I still try to consider what Zsuzsa would say about my arguments, and not just on poverty and inequality. The memory of that 1971 afternoon in her Essex office continues to help me focus on the key structural issues.

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